

Introductory Note:

The whole idea with this approach is to help students build a template for themselves on which they can 'hang' a poem. I think to ask people who are unused to writing poetry, simply to write a poem can be quite daunting. By the time they have 'built a template' most of the really hard work is done – they have done the thinking, creating and also in a way, the planning too.

This technique can be applied no matter what the subject, all that is necessary is that you vary the questions to make them relevant.

Method:

- Having decided on the subject matter, think of a variety of questions and encourage students to write down answers. It should be stressed to them that this is creative writing and therefore there is no 'right' or 'wrong' answer to any question. The important thing is that they think about the questions and come up with answers.
 - Encourage the students to use all five senses. Students will most frequently write about what they see, but fail to concentrate on things they can hear, smell, touch and taste. Encouraging them to concentrate on what the other senses are doing can be a really good source of inspiration.
 - Give them some trigger ideas when you ask them questions, just to set their imaginations free and see what they come up with.
 - Encourage them to think about things like, what time of day it is in their piece of writing, what season/time of the year it is; what the light levels are like, what the most memorable colour is in the picture they have created etc.
 - If you ask them for example, what they can 'hear' or 'smell', some students may say they can hear nothing, or smell nothing. Pursue that idea with them, if they cannot smell or hear something, then 'give them permission' to make a smell or a noise up – what could they imagine they might hear or smell.
 - Encourage them to make an answer or several answers to each question so that they end up with plenty of raw material.
 - Make sure they feel free to use as few or as many of their own answers as they wish when they come to write their poems.
 - They can use free form if they wish, but it is often more reassuring for children to give them a form in which to write and a suggested length, e.g. you might like to tell them that you want at least fourteen lines, or for less able children, maybe a haiku or a cinquain. That way every child should end up with a poem.
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Reminder:

Haiku = 3 line poem: 1st line 5 syllables, 2nd line, 7 syllables, 3rd line, five syllables
Cinquain = 5 line poem: 1st line 2 syllables, 2nd line 4 syllables, 3rd line 6 syllables, 4th line 8 syllables, 5th line 2 syllables.

Note: This is not an exhaustive list of questions. If others occur to you, ask yourself them.

Questions:

- What can you smell? (right here and now and what smells might be lingering)
- What can you hear? (here and now and what sounds might still be ringing?)
- What time of the night/day and what season of the year are you going to set your poem in?
- What is the predominant colour in this scene?
- What is the predominant texture in the spot you have chosen? How does it feel to the touch?
- What shapes and surfaces are you aware of? (angles, curves etc.)
- What are the light levels like in your chosen spot?
- What is the temperature like and how does that make you feel?
- Are there any shadows and how do they fall, and what size are they?
- What sorts of people use this space? Might have used this space in the past? Might use this space in the future?
- Are they there voluntarily or do they have to be there?
- What do you like most and least about this space?
- Why do you like it the least or most?
- What is the prevailing emotion you feel when in this space?
- Why do you think this space is as it is?